

REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES

OF THE

FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY.

THE Trustees of the Free Public Library present to the City Council, their Fifth Annual Report.

The general aspects of the institution are unchanged. It has continued to do its work, imparting to our people useful instruction and innocent and improving recreation. It still maintains its high position in the minds of the people; every year finds it more firmly rooted in their regards, and thus far the administration of its affairs has been in harmony with the principles upon which it was established, and has given satisfaction to the inhabitants of the city.

For more than four years it has been in successful operation, giving evidence from its results of the wisdom which planned, the liberality which established, and of the enlightened and vigilant guardianship by which it has been cherished and sustained.

In every respect in which it can be viewed, it must be regarded as a most successful undertaking. The

people of New Bedford have found it a source of great and enduring advantage. It has entertained, enlightened, and improved them. They have realized from it advantages beyond the promise of its inception. The range of its influence has been wider and deeper. Its educational features are gradually unfolding, and giving it a higher and more comprehensive position. It is at work in the minds and hearts of the people, and the more influential it becomes, the more deeply it is cherished, and the more active and earnest is the determination to sustain it in all its integrity and to enlarge the sphere of its operations. It has come to be indented with our views of Municipal prosperity and well-being; and while partaking of its advantages, we are not indifferent to the fact, that our city has increased its reputation by its early and earnest action in this direction.

The establishment of a Free Public Library, while it has been profitable to our people, has brought us a rich harvest of praise. Its plan, progress and position, are subjects of remark and commendation in all parts of the country. Now that four years of successful experience have sanctioned the wisdom which gave to us the theory of a Library for the people, many other communities are looking towards us earnestly and hopefully; and there are movements making in various parts of our country, indicated by the constant demands which are making for our reports, which promise the extension of the principle and plan to many of our sister municipalities.

We look upon it as a most fortunate and important circumstance, that we have, in this city, made a demonstration so successful, of the principle upon which the law of our Commonwealth is founded. Had there been

wanting in our experiment, the liberality and devotedness which are the only foundation for success in such an undertaking, the result would have been without utility or influence. Fortunately for us, and may we not say, fortunately for the cause of public enlightenment and a free and generous intellectual culture, there was, in the beginning, and there always has been, in the Councils of our city, a deep, active, enlightened conviction, that a Free Public Library is an institution which belongs to our highest ideas of a rightly constituted municipality. The action of our City Government has been in harmony with this conviction; and while it has given to our community an educational establishment of great and constantly increasing interest and value, it has quickened into activity and hopeful effort many thoughtful minds and earnest hearts in various parts of our country, who have heard of our undertaking and its successful issue. We are gratified at this result. A measure so successful here, cannot fail of success in other communities similarly situated. It is good for any people, to unite in establishing and fostering an institution having for its object the public enlightenment and welfare. There is dignity and elevation in the union of the minds and hearts of a community in such a work. There are elements in it which elevate it above all the conflicts of party, above all the disturbing, dividing and alienating circumstances which are found to exist wherever men have gathered for their common welfare. It is significant of progress in the right direction, when we find such a work has been accomplished—it gives encouragement and hope when the minds of any community are intent upon engaging in such an undertaking—it is a source of gratification and of commen-

dable pride to know, that such a purpose and such a consummation have an intimate and important connection with our own united and successful movement. To such of our sister communities as may now be giving their attention to the subject of Free Public Libraries, we can say with confidence, that the success which has attended the effort here, has been far beyond the highest anticipations of those who were the pioneers in the enterprize. The statements contained in the former Reports of this Board, showing the beneficial operations of the institution, the interest with which it is regarded by the people, and the elevated position which it has attained, under the fostering influence of enlightened municipal action, demand from us neither denial or modification. On the contrary, we can cheerfully unite with those who have preceded us in the honorable position of Trustees of the New Bedford Free Public Library, in giving the sanction of our judgment and experience to the declarations which they have so repeatedly and earnestly given forth to the public. In the Reports of our predecessors, there is to be found a faithful record of what the public has done for the Library, and what the Library has done for the public. This record may be received without qualification or modification. It is a record creditable to our city, and full of encouragement to the friends of a more genial culture everywhere. To all, here or elsewhere, who would acquaint themselves with the history of this successful fulfillment of a wise design for the benefit of the people, this record may be given, as one reliable in its facts, and useful as an encouragement and guide, to those who would imitate and profit by the example which it furnishes.

The year now about to close, while it does not call upon us to lay before the City Council any facts of material importance in the operations of the Board of Trustees, is nevertheless, an important one in the history of our cherished institution. On the 28th day of August last, the corner stone of our Library edifice was laid; and on the day that this Report will be placed in the hands of the City Government, the building will be nearly finished.

The completion of this work will form a memorable era in the history of the Public Library of New Bedford. Anxious as the Trustees of this institution have been for a place of deposit for our large, valuable, and constantly increasing collection, less liable to destruction, more convenient of access, and more ample in its accommodations for the visitors to the Library; and earnest and unremitted as have been their efforts and appeals, a consummation so complete had hardly been within the range of their hopes, much less of their expectations. Constituting but a part of the Body charged by the City Council with the duty of superintending the erection of the building, it belongs not to us to enter into the details of the work now so near a successful completion. Upon the Board of Commissioners, whose labors are soon to close, will it devolve to lay before you the details of those operations which have, under their direction, resulted in the erection of an edifice for the Free Public Library, safe and enduring in its character, ample and commodious in its arrangements, and beautiful and harmonious in all its architectural features.

The circumstances under which the work was commenced, are familiar to the Council and the people. A simple but impressive ceremonial marked the occa-

sion when the corner stone was laid, and in the addresses then delivered and subsequently published and distributed among the people, are to be found, the history of the Municipal action which led to the event, and some of the facts and associations which rendered the occasion interesting and memorable to the inhabitants of our city. The name of the Architect,* who had planned, and of the builder,† who had taken upon himself to execute, are there given. Full of confidence and hope, inspired by what had been at that time accomplished, one of those upon whom had been conferred the honor of addressing the people on the occasion, thus gave expression to the feelings and anticipations of those who had been charged with the undertaking.

“The foundation walls are firmly placed; the corner stone is immovably fixed in its appropriate position; an enlightened and ever to be commemorated public liberality has provided ample means; devoted, earnest and competent Commissioners have been selected and given themselves to the work; an Architect, with a large experience, a cultivated taste, and an affluence of that zeal and love of the beautiful and true, which finds its highest reward in giving form and fixedness to their creations, has given us arrangements of convenience and elevations of beauty; a master builder has grappled with the undertaking, who to that clear apprehension of beauty and fitness which lies at the foundation of architectural success, and that practical knowledge without which all architectural affluence were as worthless as the baseless fabric of a vision, unites that love of art, that meritorious striving after excel-

* Solomon K. Eaton, Esq.

† Henry Pierce, Esq.

lence, that praiseworthy emulation after a high and enduring reputation, which are an earnest of well-doing, and a pledge that a liberal devotedness of means and a design of skill and beauty can be entrusted to his mechanical guardianship.

“Thus auspiciously have we commenced our work. Thus do we find on the day devoted to the important and interesting ceremony of placing the corner stone of our edifice, that the forms and the forces by whose combination and harmonious action the work is to be accomplished are all arranged and marshalled, and give to all an assurance of a speedy and perfect consummation.

“Allow me, fellow-citizens, to congratulate you upon this memorable and auspicious event. Allow me to use the language of a chastened exultation and a reasonable enthusiasm in view of the high position given to us as a community by this noble work, and of the unspeakable advantages which will flow to this people from the institution which will have this beautiful edifice as the guardian of its intellectual treasures; the attractive home of the seekers after intellectual enjoyment and wealth, the perennial source and the truthful emblazonry of refinement, high mental cultivation, and a correct taste, and a heartfelt love of all things beautiful and pure.”

These hopes and anticipations have been realized. There has been “harmonious action” between the “forms and the forces” by which the work was to be accomplished. He who designed, and he who had been selected to execute, have come up to the full measure of this confident and hopeful announcement. In no respect have they come short of the anticipations thus expressed; and aided by the labors of the Commission

charged with the superintendence and direction of the work, they have erected a building substantial and neat in its workmanship, convenient in its arrangements, and beautiful and striking in its architectural characteristics.

We should do violence to the feelings with which we have constantly regarded this undertaking, should we fail to congratulate the City Council and the people they represent, upon the completion of this work.

The "ornate and enduring receptacle and safeguard of our Bibliothecal Treasures," thus characterised in anticipation, is completed; and in no respect does it fall short of the high hopes and expectations which found expression in the language we have transferred to our Report. The building is an ornament to our city; and when associated, as it ever will be, with the enlightened and honorable purpose in which it had its origin, will, as long as its walls shall endure, be a source of commendable pride and satisfaction to the inhabitants of New Bedford. And we shall all be proud to remember, and the memory thereof will linger with many of the generations who will succeed us, that not only is it true, that the library that is to be placed within its walls, was "THE VERY FIRST FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY KNOWN TO THE ANNALS OF THE WORLD," but it is also true that this is THE VERY FIRST FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY EDIFICE EVER COMPLETED.

Although the principal room of the building is completed, several weeks must elapse before it will be ready for the reception of the books. In the mean time, a thorough examination of the library must be made, and measures taken for a more perfect classification and convenient arrangement.

That this may be done effectively, the books must all be called in, and for a short period retained. The

public will gain by a detention, which will allow the Trustees to open the doors of the new building, with every arrangement for the accommodation of the inhabitants, carefully matured and effectually completed. It will be a work of much labor; but that the advantages of our beautiful and convenient rooms may not be lost, there must be given to our operations, when they shall re-commence under such auspicious circumstances, the advantages of a plan the most perfect that it may be in the power of the managers to provide.

Our efficient and industrious Librarian, ever intent upon promoting in every way in his power the usefulness of the institution and the convenience of the public, has already made much progress in the work of preparing a catalogue. This is a laborious undertaking; but when completed it will be of essential service to those who wish to avail themselves of the advantages of the Library.

With the occupancy of the library edifice, a perfect arrangement of the books, and the completion of the catalogue, a new impulse and an enlarged sphere of operations will be given to our Free Public Library. Then will the idea of those who gave the first impulse to this movement be realized. Then shall it be the boast of our city, that it has within its borders, established by the people and by the people cherished and sustained, free to all as the schools and the highways are free, attractive to all by its concomitants of architectual fitness and beauty, convenient for all by arrangements of careful and comprehensive adaptation, and accessible to all from its central and prominent position, an institution, established and dedicated and sustained for the high and noble purpose of informing, elevating and refining the minds of the people, giving

to those whom the public schools can no longer retain, educational facilities calculated to stimulate and satisfy the never dying thirst after knowledge which claims the companionship of every rightly directed mind ; winning the young to the love of books, to the love of a pure and elevating literature, to the love of refined and intellectual pursuits and recreations, while it opens avenues to the attainment of useful knowledge, and aids in the important labor of preparing them for the work which their hands may find to do ; affording opportunities seldom enjoyed, for the females of the community to participate, not only in the advantages to be derived from books, but in the pleasure and profit of quiet and prolonged study ; multiplying in many ways the enjoyments of the people, while it gives dignity to intellectual pursuits, and throws the charms of a refined and cultivated taste around the pleasures and pursuits of all conditions and all classes ; giving to all loftier and more comprehending views of man's intellectual capacity ; aiding in the formation of those habits of self-respect which all should cherish, and those habits of thought and mental action which adorn and dignify, while they elevate and protect ; in a word, spreading broad-cast through our community those aids to mental and moral efforts, to the love of knowledge and the desire for excellence, which give hope and strength in the struggle of life, which throw around the pathway of existence the light of all things beautiful, and the love of all things pure, and which while they constitute the most elevating and enduring of man's earthly purposes and hopes, are significant of that alliance and destiny which belong to him as an immortal being, and are, in their highest and purest form, "golden links which connect the children of

earth with the throne of the Eternal," and which the religion of the Gospel so hallows and directs, that the problem of man's destiny is solved, and the Christian finds himself the recipient of the promise of this world and of that which is to come.

With regard to the increase of the library, the same general plan has been followed as in previous years. Of the new issues from the press, such have been added as were in accordance with our design and within the reach of our means, while of the standard literature of our language we have made a large number of valuable accessions. Every year has found us, through the judicious expenditure of the means which the liberality of the Council has annually devoted to this object, with a large increase of valuable books both new and old; and although the process is slow, yet we look forward to the time, when the united action of public and private liberality, and a wise and prudent administration of our means, shall give to the people of our city a library, second to none in our Commonwealth in all that constitutes the real wealth of such an institution.

We feel that we are, as yet, but upon the threshold of our undertaking. To perfect it, will call for many days and years of earnest and well-directed effort. There must be the same enlightened liberality and the same unremitting devotedness bestowed upon the institution now so highly and so justly appreciated, if we would continue to have it a source of usefulness and an object of regard, and if we would ensure for it that improvement and progress which constitute indispensable elements in its constitution. But as we look upon the past, we have no fears for the future. The work is in the hands of the people. By them it will con-

tinue to be cherished and sustained, and the children of those by whom it was established, educated under its influence, and taught to look upon it as an institution held in special regard, by their fathers, will not fail to bestow upon it that fostering attention which will ensure its continuance and prosperity.

We are gratified to be able to announce the receipt of many valuable books as donations to our institution. The names of the donors will be found connected with this report. There is no part of our duty that gives us more pleasure, than that which calls upon us to lay before our fellow-citizens this portion of the records of our board. To the thoughtful and enlightened liberality and attention of our friends, we are indebted for many highly cherished volumes. Every such volume is regarded by us with a special interest. It brings with itself the welcome and encouraging fact, that, beyond the circle of those who have been officially entrusted with the management of the library, there are many who are heedful of its importance, and who are desirous of promoting its prosperity and usefulness. The reflection, to those who are charged with its management, is ever a joyous one, that the number of those is large and increasing whose thoughts are intent upon its interests, and whose minds and hearts are "devising liberal things" with regard to it. Again would we express our grateful acknowledgements to those who have been thus thoughtful of us, and who have placed upon our records and our shelves the evidence of their enlightened and benevolent regard. In all coming time, will this portion of our municipal records be regarded with a deep and abiding interest. The generations which shall come after us will seek upon it for the names of those who have thus come down to them

as public benefactors, and children will be gratified to find there, the names of parents who have honored themselves and honored *them*, by contributing to the growth and prosperity of an institution so closely identified with the prosperity and reputation of the city.

While we thus do justice to the past, may we not be allowed to express ourselves hopefully and earnestly for the future. With no considerations to influence us but such as belong to a deeply rooted conviction that we are "zealously affected in a good thing," we could wish to find access to many, whose "pure minds" if once "stirred up by way of remembrance," would not fail to "devise liberal things concerning us. We know that it may be most emphatically said of the institution in whose behalf we are pleading, that "by liberal things shall it stand." No form of words could more aptly express the idea which lies at the foundation of the work in which we are engaged. Liberality is its life. It came into existence at its bidding, it has flourished under its fostering care, and its future is bright with a radiance thrown around it by our hopeful confidence. Liberality, public and private; liberality of thought, feeling and action; liberality that recognizes the obligation and feels the joy of dealing justly and nobly with the manhood of every member of God's earthly family; this is the word, which in its beautiful comprehensiveness more fully than any other, expresses the origin, the aims, and the needs of our Free Public Library. Therefore it is that we feel great freedom in using it, when we would incite to thought and action favorable to a cause so worthy of the advocacy and assistance of all generous hearted and right minded persons. We ask them to be liberal towards our new, but influential and valuable Public Educational

Institute—liberal in thought, liberal in feeling, and, as they may have ability and opportunity, liberal in action.

We want from the wealthy and enlightened citizens of New Bedford, what we cannot obtain from the action, however liberal and harmonious, of our Municipal authorities. That want would be met by finding in the alcoves of our beautiful Library hall, and upon the walls of the tasteful edifice now about to be dedicated to the cause of public enlightenment and progress, the evidence of a lively sympathy with the movement and of a disposition on the part of those upon whom have been bestowed large stores of material wealth, to direct a portion of it into this channel. Money can purchase books, and pictures and statues; and money will come, when votes are passed and City officials demand it in the name of the Commonwealth. But money cannot purchase that feeling, born of gratitude and benevolence and of a thoughtful and rightful apprehension of the brotherhood of man and of man's craving for sympathy and for a good beyond the joys of sense, which bids those to whom Providence has been bountiful and who feel the responsibilities of the stewardship to which they have been called, to send forth for the well-being of their fellow-men, the rich streams of their bounty directed and hallowed by elevated thought and self-forgetting charity, to cheer, to refresh, to renovate, to bless.

Let us then multiply the evidences of this manly, this Christian feeling. Let the whole field be made green and beautiful by an irrigation, generous and bountiful, from those rich fountains of pecuniary ability and elevated sentiment. Let there be concentrated within the walls of our Library edifice, a spot consecrated, not only to moral and mental improvement, but to the cul-

tivation and enjoyment of a spirit of self-sacrifice and devotion to the public well-being, many of the treasures of literature and art, not only diffusing around the rich delights of taste, and the valuable accumulations of knowledge, but sending forth constantly and forcibly, the teachings which fill the mind with thoughts of an enlightened munificence and awaken within us emotions of gratitude and good will.

The following statistics exhibit the operation of the Library for the past year. During the year ending March 4th, there have been taken from the Library *twenty-three thousand one hundred and sixty books*.

The number of new cards issued during the same period, is *seven hundred and twenty-five*.

The whole number of cards issued is, *four thousand six hundred and sixty-two*.

Six hundred and eighteen volumes have been added during the year, *five hundred and forty-nine* by purchase and *sixty-nine* by donation.

The number of books now out is about *twelve hundred*.

The number of volumes in the Library, about *ten thousand*.

Books and other publications have been received from the following persons:

Mrs. Eliza Wood, Mrs. Sarah Coffin, Charles L. Flint, Esq., Secretary of the Board of Agriculture, Hon. Charles Sumner, Hon. Robert B. Hall, Hon. L. B. Comins, Gen. Thomas Lawson, Doct. N. B. Shurtleff, Parmenius Parsons, Esq., Abner J. Phipps, Esq., Albert Gilbert, Esq., John Fisk Allen, Esq., A. K. Whittemore, Esq., Samuel Rodman, Esq., James B. Congdon, Esq., William Duane, Esq., Charles Mason, Commissioner of Patents, State of New York, State of

Rhode Island, Connecticut Historical Society, Portsmouth, Va., Relief Association, Smithsonian Institute, Library Company, New York, William Logan Fisher.

All of which is respectfully submitted,

GEORGE HOWLAND, JR.,

Mayor of the City, and, *ex-officio*,

Pres't, of the Board of Trustees.

ABNER J. PHIPPS, SEC'Y.